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Conference Sermon

PREACHED AT THE FIRST MEETING OF THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF UNITARIAN AND OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES, APRIL 4, 1865

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BOSTON
GEORGE H. ELLIS CO., 272 CONGRESS STREET
1909

CONFERENCE SERMON

"Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you; but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."— ACTS xiii. 46.

THIS text records one of the most important events in the history of Christianity. Then Christianity effected what, in military matters, is called a change of base. Christianity had hitherto rested on Judaism, and drawn its supplies from among Jews and Jewish proselytes. Henceforth it was to have its foundation on human nature, and the gospel was to be preached to every creature. Before, its arguments were taken from the Old Testament and from Jewish prophecy: now it was to appeal to the indestructible instincts and aspirations of the heart of man. Christianity till now had been a development of Judaism, an advanced party of Jewish believers, a reform on Moses. Now and forever after it was to be the Church Universal,—an inspiration, not a tradition; a near approach of God to man; not the termination of an old order, but the beginning of a new one.

No wonder that the text says that Paul and Barnabas waxed bold when they took this position. It requires courage in a general to break away from his communications. But to break away from moral communications

requires, perhaps, more courage still. To abandon all traditions, the form of worship made sacred by the associations of a thousand years, the phrases steeped in the piety of many generations; to leave the mother Church on whose bosom our infancy was nestled; to fly from that warm nest into the cold air of independent thought,— this requires that faith in ideas out of which alone the highest courage can ever come.

Under the lead of Martin Luther, Christianity made another change of base, cutting loose from all Catholic traditions, to appeal once again to universal instincts. Under John Wesley, Christianity in England effected once more the same change of base, going with its lay preachers, its class-meetings, its open-air services, and its simple worship, to find the poor. But neither Martin Luther nor John Wesley, neither George Fox nor Roger Williams, neither Priestley nor Channing, was as brave as Paul. For all these could appeal to the earliest traditions against later corruptions,— to the first century against the fifteenth and eighteenth, to the Four Gospels and the apostolic age. They did not cut wholly loose from tradition, though their chief appeal was to the human soul. "Martin Luther," says Lord Bacon, "conducted, no doubt, by a higher Providence, but in discourse of reason, finding what a province he had undertaken against the Bishop of Rome and the degenerate traditions of his own time, was enforced to awaken all antiquity, and call former times to his succor, to make a party against the present time." But Paul had no antiquity to awaken.

His opponents could say: "The Jewish Church which

you reject was, by your own confession, founded by God himself. Every one of its ceremonies, its sacrifices, its feasts, is distinctly ordained by Moses in those sacred books which you yourself accept as the Word of God. The priesthood of Aaron, which you set aside, was ordained by the Almighty, who forbade any one not descended from Levi to act as a priest; and its succession, instead of resting on any vague assumption or doubtful tradition, is made certain by genealogies so carefully preserved that the ancestry of every priest in Judah can be traced all the way up to Levi himself. Did your Master, Jesus, ever abolish the Levitical Law? On the contrary, he was a Jew, he was circumcised. He kept the law himself, and commanded his disciples to do the same, and positively declared, 'I have not come to destroy the law or the prophets; for not a jot or tittle shall pass from the law till all be fulfilled.' When did Jesus ever say the Mosaic institutions were to be abolished? Never. And God himself has pronounced them eternal, and called the covenant with Abraham an everlasting covenant. Besides, what harm can it do to accept the Jewish law? Is it not safer to do too much than too little? Is it not unphilosophical to suppose that forms are unnecessary because spirit is necessary? Does not religion need a body as well as a soul? Are not Jewish ceremonies the body which God himself has appointed? Can there be more than one right way? Paul himself admits it is not wrong for Jewish Christians to keep the law. Can what is right for them be wrong for others? The Jewish way is the old way, sanctified by the usage of patriarchs, prophets, and saints.''

But, in opposition to this weight of authority, the apostle Paul succeeded in changing the base of Christianity from Judaism to humanity, and so, in changing it from the religion of a race and sect, to the religion of the world.

It is the prerogative of genius to see universal truths in the most trivial incidents. From a few scratches on the rock Agassiz deduces the glacial theory of the globe. From a few half-perceptible lines in the solar spectrum Kirchoff has been able to infer the chemical substances burning in the sun's atmosphere. Comparing the etymology of words in European languages, scholars like Max Müller have read history behind history, and tell us the social condition of the Aryan family on the plains of Asia before they appeared in Europe as Greeks and Romans, Kelts and Germans. So, out of a little every-day incident in a Syrian home, Jesus educes one of the most significant truths of universal religion. Jesus came to a friendly house in Bethany. One of the sisters asked him to let the other help her in what she thought ought to be done. He replied, "Martha, thou art troubled about many things: but one thing is needful; and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her." One thing is needful; that is, to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to him. That is what constitutes a Christian. It is to be a disciple, a learner, a pupil. We do not require of a pupil that he shall be learned. We require only that he shall be a learner. So to be a Christian requires that one shall be a disciple, learning of Christ. This is that saving faith, — that faith by which souls are redeemed, justified, converted, and saved.

I know that many persons contend that it is not faith, but love, which is the one thing needful. They say, "Love God with all your heart, and your neighbor as yourself." They say charity is greater than faith. This has long been a standing dispute between two parties in the Church, — the party of Paul and of John, the party of faith and of works. The orthodox have usually contended for faith, the liberal for works of love. But this long quarrel will be reconciled when we see the distinction between the religion of the means and the religion of the end. The end of all is love. To love God and love man is to dwell in God and have God dwell in us. It is being good and doing good. It is piety and charity. It is, in fact, being in heaven. The end of the commandment is love. But, suppose we have not that love, how shall we reach it? what steps take to get it? I am not loving God nor man. I am living without God in the world, and so without hope. How shall I aim to love him, and to love my brother as myself? You tell me to love God and man. But that is the very thing I cannot do. I want to be helped to do it. What are the means? How shall I go to God if I am too blind to see the way, too weak to walk in it, too much discouraged to attempt it? To those in this state of mind Jesus comes and says: "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

The one thing needful, therefore, as an end is love. The one thing needful as a means is faith. "The end of the commandment," says Paul, "is love, out of a pure heart and out of a good conscience and out of faith unfeigned." Flowing from these sources, which are one,

from a conscientious and sincere faith, love comes to us, — love the end, faith the means.

If I am loving God and man, I do not need Christ as a Saviour; for I am already saved. The end has come when he has given up the kingdom of my heart to God, even the Father. Christ, then, ceases to be Saviour, and becomes Brother and Friend. But the moment that I fall out of this love, I need him again as Saviour. I need to come again through him to my Father. I need once more to sit at his feet and hear his divine words,— "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." I need, in my sense of sin, to hear him say, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more." So, while love is the one thing needful as the end, faith is the one thing needful as the means.

But this faith is not any belief in doctrines. What doctrines did Mary believe when she sat at the feet of Jesus? The saving, essential faith is not the belief in any doctrines about Christ, but trusting in Christ himself. It is putting our hand in his, to be led by him.

The Church has always had more Marthas than Marys, and it has been governed by the Marthas. They have been troubled about many things,— making great preparations for the Master's entertainment, serving him, as they suppose, by getting up ceremonies, creeds, and forms of worship. The Marthas have been troubled to know which is the true Church and which the orthodox doctrine. The whole external history of Christianity has been made up of the doings of the Marthas: their

councils and synods; their controversies about the nature of God and man; disputes between Athanasians, Arians, and Sabellians, Monophysites and Monotheites, Augustinians, Pelagians, and Semi-Pelagians; controversies about discipline and worship, about orders in the ministry, about baptism and the Lord's Supper, about naturalism and supernaturalism. They have not allowed the poor Marys to sit quietly at the Master's feet, but have insisted that Mary, too, should come and take part in their disputes,—that she should trouble herself, too, about the true Church and the true creed.

But the evil of this is that, when secondary things are made essential, the essential become secondary.

When the Church of Rome tells us that there is no salvation possible out of her communion, it becomes the one thing needful to find out if that is so. The one thing needful is not to sit at Christ's feet, but to find out the right Church, and go into that. When Orthodoxy tells us that there is no salvation possible except we believe the Trinity, total depravity, the atonement, and the like, the one thing needful is to find out if these are true and to try to believe them. And, when others tell us that no man is a Christian who has not been converted according to some form of technical experience, then the one thing needful is to find out how to get that experience. We cannot sit at Christ's feet now; but we must first find out which is the true Church, the true creed, the true experience. Christ may be still the door, but he is an inside door. We have to go through a good many other doors before we can get to him. The one thing needful is not to sit at Christ's feet, but to get

into the true Church, to believe the true doctrine, to have the true experience. These are put in his place: these become primary. He is made secondary. He ceases to be the one mediator between God and man; for between him and man are built up this fabric of other mediators, to whom we must go first, in order to get to him. As in the Roman Church Mary and the saints are practically mediators between Christ and men, so in the Protestant churches creeds and forms are practically the mediators; and, in order to go to Jesus, we must go through them, or not at all.

And, therefore, it has become necessary to effect another change of base for Christianity; and it is the work of all liberal Christians to do this. Just as Paul said, "It is not necessary to be a Jew in order to be a Christian," so we must say, "It is not necessary to find the true Church, it is not necessary to find the true creed, it is not necessary to find the true experience, in order to be a Christian." Just as Paul taught that a man could be a Christian without being a Jew, so we must declare that a man can be a Christian without being in this or that church, without believing this or that creed, without having this or that special religious experience. Be a Christian first, and all these shall come. "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." And more than this: as Paul declared that, when a man made himself a Jew in order to be a Christian, he could not be a Christian at all,—"Behold, I, Paul, say unto you that, if you be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing: Christ has become of no effect to you, whosoever of you are

justified by the law,"— so we must say that those who make the non-essentials essential make the essential non-essential.

Placing ourselves, therefore, to-day, as every reformer of Christianity from the beginning has placed himself, on this position of the apostle Paul, it is part of our mission to the nineteenth century to show the heresy of putting anything between Christ and those he is to save. While others declare Christ to be shut up in their church, their creed, their own special type of piety, let us teach that he is outside of them all; that he is in the street as well as in the church; that he is with us on Monday and Tuesday, when we are buying and selling, as much as on Sunday, when we are praying. We must assert, with no ambiguous sound, that we can be Christians not only in that part of life which is spent in prayer, but that part also which we spend in working in the field or casting our vote at the polls. That is to say, Christianity does not consist merely in special and distinct acts of piety, at certain places and times, but in regulating all of life by the sense of responsibility, and filling all of life with the sense of dependence. We must say plainly that a clergyman is no more religious when he is preaching in church on Sunday than a school-boy is in studying his lesson conscientiously on Monday.

Unitarians have also a great work to do in teaching that there is nothing unnatural in Christianty; that it is an inspiration coming from God, to develop and unfold our nature, not to change it; that God is in nature around us, as well as in Christianity within us; that Christ comes first to convert us when we are going

wrong, then to direct and harmonize all our powers, and to unite our hearts to fear and love God's name. Christ makes us new creatures, not by adding anything to our nature not there already, but by giving us new things to know, new things to love, and new things to do.

And, again, Unitarians have to show that the object of Christ is not to save the soul hereafter from an outward hell, but to save the soul here and hereafter from the hell of sin; that, when we are selfish and wilful, we go away from God and go into hell; that, when we are generous and true, we go toward God and into heaven. Christ comes to us to save us by bringing us to God, making us who were afar off nigh, giving us a sense of our Father's perpetual presence in nature, in providence, and in the soul. We are to teach that there is no doctrine more dishonorable to God than that his mercy does not endure forever, but only during the seventy years of life, and that, as soon as a man dies, his probation ceases. We are to teach that God is our Father in the other world as in this; that there, as here, if he punishes us, it is for our good; and that his end in all of creation is to bring all souls to himself, in that great day of his judgment when every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and in earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father, — when, all things being subject to the Son and all enemies under his feet, the last rebel obedient and the last sinner penitent, death and hell both cast into the lake of fire, the Son shall give up the kingdom to the Father, and God be all in all.

Paul took the gospel over from the Jew to the Gentile.

In every age it is necessary to do the same. Martin Luther carried it from the Roman Catholics to the heretics. He brought Christ to those who were outside of sacraments, outside of rites, forms, holy usages, long-hallowed traditions. He made it possible for men to be Christians without being Roman Catholics. He thus effected another change of base for Christianity. Henceforth it rested, not only upon old traditions, but upon living faith; not only on sacred forms, but on the spontaneous worship of the soul. Methodism, in England and America, has repeated the same process. It has brought the gospel out of the Church into the street, out from the stern company of Puritanic believers to the large body of hard-working men and women who had no time for Orthodoxy; from among the thinkers to the feelers. Wesleyan Methodism changed the base of Christianity from the head to the heart.

And now, once more, the time has come for Christianity to effect a change of base. Unitarians, in the providence of God, have been called to take the first step. We, a feeble, forlorn hope of the army, — a mere advanced post of the coming squadrons, — have secured a little position, which we are holding until the rest of the great force shall arrive. As Paul made it possible for Gentiles to become Christians without becoming Jews; as Luther made it possible for the Gentiles of his day — the outsiders and heretics — to become Christians without becoming Roman Catholics; as Wesley made it possible for the colliers and poor day-laborers to have the gospel without going to church or chapel, without becoming churchmen or theologians, — so liberal Christians

are to make it possible for men to become Christians without accepting the type of Christianity which alone passes current as orthodox.

And we can do this only by bringing Christ to men where they are. Preachers stand in the pulpit, and cry from year to year: "Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!" But the true Jesus does not sit in the pulpit, waiting till the world comes to him. He goes to the world. He goes out to seek and save the lost. He leaves the ninety-and-nine orthodox believers, and goes to seek the poor, lost atheist, sceptic, heretic. Christ is to be found to-day just where he was to be found in Judea. Look for him among the publicans and sinners. Look for him among the religious outlaws. If there be a Thomas Didymus, who cannot believe except on the evidence of the senses, Christ, instead of excommunicating him, goes and gives him the evidence he wants,—lets him come to Christianity through the physical world and the laws of matter, and, perhaps, makes of him one of his apostles. The Lord Jesus always is with those who are outside of the Church, in the highways and hedges of the world, going to find the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind. He goes with that section of the Church, in every age, which is looking for the lost sheep. In the first century he left Peter and James, and went with Paul to seek them among the Gentiles. In the thirteenth century he left Pope Innocent III., Saint Dominic, and the orthodox Inquisitors, and was among the persecuted Albigenses. In the sixteenth century he went with Luther to find the outcasts and heretics whom the Church had excommunicated. To-day, too, if there

are any who are seeking the poor, the maimed, the halt, and the blind, Jesus is with them.

Christian brethren, — members of the National Unitarian Convention which is to meet to-morrow, — why have we thus come together? Have we come together as Unitarians for the pleasure of standing alone and of being called heretics? Are we Unitarians because we like being shut out from the sympathy of the Church? No. We often long for the larger communion of the Universal Church. No doubt it is pleasanter to float with the stream than to go against the current. Nor do we stand here as Unitarians because we cannot see how much of truth and of good there is in the churches from which we differ.

We, too, desire to have our share in that deeper life born of God, coming through the mediation of Jesus of Nazareth, which changes duty into love, work into freedom, and puts the spirit into the heart whereby we call God our Father. There is no rapture of piety in the Catholic or Protestant Church, no mystic ecstasy, no inspired insight in any of the great cloud of witnesses belonging to the Christian family in heaven and earth but we humbly acknowledge its sweetness and strength, and long to appropriate it in our own life. We are not Unitarians because we do not see the good and truth which there is in Orthodoxy.

But we are Unitarians, we are willing to be called heretics, we consent to stand alone and to be regarded in all orthodox and evangelical circles as the filth of the world and the offscouring of all things unto this day, because we see a work to be done which we ought to do.

Our very existence, indeed, does good as a standing protest against that exclusive spirit which makes essentials out of matters of form and matters of opinion.

But we have met here, not to protest against Orthodoxy, but to do our own work. If our business here were to criticise the other churches or emphasize our dissent from them, then we had better have stayed at home. But the business we have in hand is not negative, but positive. We wish to do our part in bringing to God those who are away from him. If there are any outside of all sects and churches whom these churches cannot reach, and we can, by our ideas, then we wish to go and seek them, and bring them in to sit at the feet of Jesus.

Moreover, we wish to prove that Christian union can be found in work as well as in opinion. Differing from each other on many points, giving perfect freedom of opinion to all men, we are to try an experiment never before attempted in the history of the Church, — of union as the basis of Christian action instead of Christian thought. If we succeed in doing it, it will be a discovery equal to that of the law of gravitation. Can those who differ in theology unite in a Christian Church for Christian work? Hitherto it has been thought impossible. We are now to see whether there can be an active, zealous, missionary Church, without any creed, bound together only by the purpose of bringing men to God, and united only in this, — that they sit at the feet of Jesus and hear his words. If we succeed, we shall, at least, have proved what has never before been believed, — that Jesus was not mistaken in saying that this was the only essential, the one thing needful, in Christianity.

But we wish to go farther than this. This convention to meet to-morrow is, indeed, of Unitarians; and we accept as Unitarian Christians all who claim that name. We do not make ourselves responsible for each other's opinions. Probably we differ very widely from each other in many points of belief. The question is, Can we unite together in Christian work? We can work with atheists in the Sanitary Commission, to help the wounded and dying. We can work with deists in the Temperance Society, to save our brethren from ruin and despair. We can work with slaveholders and defenders of slavery in the hospitals, with Roman Catholics in the Freedman's Aid Society, with Calvinists on the School Committee. We do not compromise our faith in Theism, Christianity, Anti-slavery, Protestantism, or Unitarianism by so doing. And so, if some of our brethren here are naturalists, if they disbelieve miracles, if they carry their criticism on the New Testament farther than I do, — so long as we have work to do in which we both agree, we can cordially unite. So long as they wish to bring men to God by the teaching and life of Jesus, let us be glad to co-operate, and not be afraid of compromising ourselves thereby.

The great body of Unitarians are not philosophers, but Christians: the great heart of our body beats with warm love for the Saviour. The majority of our communion have a belief in Jesus as the mediator between God and man. There are with us those who believe more than the majority, and come nearer to the orthodox. There are with us those who believe less than the majority, and come nearer to pure naturalism. But, if we were to ex-

press the average belief of our body in a creed (which, however, we never shall do, for all our antecedents are against it), we might take the Apostles' Creed as a fair expression of the general conviction of our body.

I am, and expect to be, a Unitarian in theology. But my theology is a very small part of my Christianity. I often find myself in the fullest Christian sympathy with those from whom I most widely differ in theology. The lines which unite Christians are not the theological parallels of latitude, but the isothermal lines of faith. Great Britain and New York are in very different latitudes, but in a very similar climate. So I often find myself in the same religious climate, in the same isothermal line, with men from whom I differ very widely in my religious creed. That man of genius, courage, and piety, who is the weekly inspiration of so many thousands in the neighboring city of Brooklyn, probably differs in his theology very much from me; but I look on him as one of my leaders in this work of liberal Christianity. What do I care for his theology? What is the chaff to the wheat? I find that he is doing more than any fifty men in the land in changing the base of Christianity from a dead Orthodoxy to a life of generosity, honesty, truth, humanity, justice, freedom.

And therefore I hope that, though we meet as a Unitarian Convention this year, we shall meet next year on a yet broader basis, which shall include all liberal Christian churches who may desire to co-operate with us. We and they can be what we choose at home, — have our own names, creeds, and methods, — but can meet once a year in a National Convention with all who believe in a broad co-operation for Christian work.

Some of our churches, on either extreme, have declined taking part in this Convention, as they have a perfect right to do, — some because they are too conservative, and others because they are too radical. One of our best and most beloved ministers has printed a sermon opposing all such movements, in advance, from a fear of some supposed ecclesiastical tyranny. He advocates independence, pure and simple, which, however, is apt to run into individualism. But individualism is narrowness, and narrowness is only another kind of bondage. It is the bondage of ignorance and limitation. A man who stands by himself through fear of losing his freedom is like an anchorite who lives by himself through fear of losing his piety. No doubt there is always danger. But to run away from danger is not always the best way of avoiding it. If you are afraid that the Convention will do something wrong, go and prevent it from doing anything wrong. Do not keep by yourself and oppose all plans of co-operation, but go and do your part toward the selection of a good plan. Certainly, co-operation is not only right, but necessary. When I see how meagre and inefficient many of our churches are, how little they accomplish for the world in proportion to the noble character and high ability of their clergy and laity, I am sure that the evil, at the root of it all, is often this extreme individualism.

On the other hand, some persons stay away from this Convention, fearing it may be too radical, fearing it may admit some naturalist or heretic.

Some of those who are tormented by this fear are men who have from the same fear held aloof, during all these

glorious years, from the anti-slavery movement and this great war of freedom. They have been so afraid of heresy that they have stood dumb in the midst of this great moment of the age, when Christ has been almost visibly present in our midst, breaking the yoke of the captive and opening the prison of the slave. Some people are afraid of naturalism and radicalism, and think the Convention will not be sufficiently evangelical. Well, perhaps not: perhaps it will only be as evangelical as that Gospel which says, "Not every one who saith unto me, Lord! Lord!" Perhaps we shall only be as evangelical as that Gospel which contains the parable of the Good Samaritan. In that parable Jesus took for his good man, to contrast with the bad conduct of the holiest men of the nation, one regarded then as belonging to the most heretical of all sects, — a Samaritan. It was just as if a preacher in an Old School Presbyterian church should tell of "the Good Unitarian" as an example of piety; just as if, in South Carolina, before the war, a preacher should have illustrated virtue by a story of "the Good Abolitionist," or as if Mr. Garrison, in an anti-slavery convention, should tell a story of "the Good Slaveholder."

I am not afraid that this Convention is going into creeds and ceremonies on the one side or into naturalism and deism on the other. It is not a meeting for speculation or discussion: it is a meeting for work. It is a meeting of churches who think the time has come for organized work, and who know that individual work is work at random, while organized work is work which tells. It is a meeting of men who, when they want to

make a railroad, establish a bank, build a hospital, found a college, or feed and cure soldiers, form a corporation, — a railroad corporation, a banking corporation, a sanitary commission. What is a corporation but an organized body? Soul is good; but body is good, too.

The Church is the body of Christ. It is the hands, feet, eyes, and ears of Christ, — his eyes, with which he looks on the sufferings of men with tenderest pity; his ears, with which he hears the cries of blind souls to-day, as he heard the blind man crying at the gates of Jericho; his hands, with which to lift the wounded from the ground, and tend their wounds, and take them to the river. The Church is an organization through which the Spirit of Christ can work. If hitherto it has been rather his mouth than his hands and feet; if it has preached him in the pulpit rather than gone with him to seek and save the lost; if it has taught doctrines about him rather than carried him to a world lying in wickedness; if it has rather called on men to "Come to Jesus!" than taken Jesus to find and help them where they are, — the time has now come, we think, for a change. We wish to take part in the great and opening civilization of the new day and hour. We wish to do something for such a Christianity as the world has never yet seen, — a Christianity which shall fill all life with the sense of God's presence, which shall cast both death and hell into a lake of fire, which shall give us a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

But there is another kind of Unitarians who object to this Convention from a sort of spurious liberality. They say, "We don't care for our own denomination more than

for others." This indifference they call liberality. It is not liberality. No one can be liberal to other opinions who is indifferent to his own. The only liberality which is worth anything is that of him who has his own belief, for which he is willing to labor and suffer, which he loves and clings to, but who is ready, nevertheless, to receive with hospitality the opinions of others, and to hear what they have to say, and welcome all the truth in them.

Unitarian brethren, brother ministers, this indifference comes from a bad source. It comes from a want of faith in God and man. Let us confess that our own religion has been too lifeless, too purely intellectual, too negative, too critical. We also must change the base of our preaching from the mere intellect to the heart and life. It should not be our chief object to present opinions, but to bring souls to God. The great mass of men are away from God: they are living without God and hope in the world. If we have any right to be Christian preachers, it is because we are endeavoring to bring men to God and to his love. Our sermons are too often statements, not efforts. We rise in the pulpit to tell something, not to do something. We talk about Christianity instead of letting Christianity itself flow from our heart. We describe goodness and piety: we do not show them to our hearers in living forms of every-day experience. It is said that some of our generals have been converted to the Roman Catholic Church by the sight of the Christian fidelity and sacrifice of Catholic priests in the army. Why not? That is the best evidence — not of the truth of a doctrine, indeed, but of the power of a system —

that it fills men with a Christian spirit. I also wish to belong to any church which is full of Christian spirit. I would belong to the Church not with which I have intellectual affinity, but with which I have spiritual affinity.

We therefore, if we are to do our work, must not have less of faith and prayer and piety than others, but more. Unitarians ought to live nearer to God than any others. Our faith should lead us to live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit. Above all technical religion, mere cant of piety, we ought to live from God and to God all the day. Our views of God and man should fill us with a love which prays without ceasing, which in everything gives thanks, which does all to the glory of God, which feels his presence hour by hour, moment by moment, and says secretly and sweetly, "*Abba, Father,*" all day long.

We shall have men of this faith when we begin to do more work. Faith leads to work: work also leads to faith. He who goes to do a great Christian work casts himself on God for strength. Our working men will also be praying men.

This work is a great and noble one which we have to do. Those Unitarians who are indifferent to their own faith are so because they are ignorant of the wants of the age. They have lived, perhaps, mostly in New England, where all Christian denominations are liberal, and where the bitterness and harshness of Orthodoxy have long since passed away. But, if they knew the doctrines taught and the systems prevailing in the West and South, they would be willing to be spent and spend, in order to bring to those who need it a Christianity teaching the love of

God and the love of man. The infidelity of the South and West is the legitimate protest of the conscience, intellect, and heart against views which dishonor God and degrade man. There are tens of thousands longing for something better, living without God, because no man has ever showed him to them.

It is a maxim of Christ and Christianity that the last shall be first. The apostle tells us that it is the method of God to choose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world and things despised hath God chosen, yea! and things which are not, to bring to naught those that are." The Unitarians have been outlaws in the Church, — a poor and despised people, thought no better than infidels; but perhaps God may have chosen them to lead the way in this reform of his Church, bringing down the high mountains of lofty Orthodoxy, and filling up the low valleys of critical, doubting Rationalism, until all flesh shall see the glory of the Lord. If we, too, go forward and change our base of operations, leaving our New England basis of traditional Unitarianism for the broader platform of a liberal Christianity, which shall include all earnest lovers of truth and all who need to see God, the Father, and man, the brother, then, perhaps, it will be seen that we have not remained so long outside of all the older organizations in vain.

We have been accused of coldness. If our system has been cold, it may still have been useful. Cold, as well as heat, has done good work in the world. Men of science tell us that the earth was once half-covered with ice,

and that this ice crushed, with its advancing and receding masses, the rocks into impalpable dust, and so prepared the soil which bears grass for cattle and herb for man. Those great glacial masses were the mills of God, to grind down, mix together, and arrange the agricultural soils of the earth. Perhaps the cold intellect of rationalistic thinkers has been necessary to grind down the creeds of the churches, and fit them for a soil in which human love and human convictions may take root and grow.

So it is that God chooses the despised things of the world to do his work.

The great river of Christian faith is fed not only from the main stream of orthodox belief, but also by a thousand auxiliary tributaries, — by the heresies of every age, by the protestants who have stood alone, each in his lonely thought, like solitary springs in separate and distant valleys. The come-outers and critics have added their portion to the stream, the visionaries and fanatics theirs, the unknown martyrs theirs. Each of the great rivers of the world — Father Rhine, Father Nile, Father Mississippi — has its source in many distant valleys and lakes and mountains lying wide apart. Some of its waters come from cold and icy ravines, from the bosom of enormous glaciers among the upper mountains. Some come from lakes, sleeping peacefully amid the farms and forests. Some of its tributaries stretch far away for hundreds of miles, in streams almost as majestic as that of the river into which they empty. But the waters flow together, and make one mighty current, which rolls on to the ocean, an undivided tide. It has eddies which seem to run backward. But in reality they only seem

to go backward: they soon fall again into the general tendency of the river. It has streams which run out of it, but they return again after a short circuit. It sometimes eats away its banks, and leaves its old channel, making a new and shorter one. It sometimes overflows them, and spreads itself far and wide, covering the plains with a watery inundation; and sometimes it shrinks away, parched by summer heat, and seems about to disappear. But age after age it continues essentially the same, flowing from the same source, flowing toward the same outlet, into the same infinite sea. "Volvitur et volvetur, in omne volubilis ævum."

The great river of (orthodox) Christian faith has, in like manner, many sources. One of its great tributaries reaches far away, for thousands of years before the birth of Christ, to the plains of Mamre and the days of Abraham. It brings down the knowledge of our God, the Maker and Lord of heaven and earth, from those old patriarchal days, when the shepherd chiefs looked from their tent-doors up into the silent sky, beaming with unnumbered stars, and said, "The Lord is here, and I knew it not: this is none other than the house of God and the gate of heaven." Down along the channel of this old stream the pure waters of monotheism flow, past the towers of Melchisedek and the well of Jacob and through the plains of Egypt, whence, issuing with a fuller volume, fed by the wisdom of the Egyptians, it is called henceforth Judaism. How many of the great ideas of Moses and Job and David and Isaiah feed to-day the thoughts of Christendom, and make a part of orthodox Christianity! But also many side streams, from Persia

and Assyria, many a conviction born in Greece, many an idea originating in the cold mountains of Scandinavia, have at last become part of Christian faith. For Christianity is hospitable, and accepts all living truth from all quarters, and finds room for it in its deep channel. How much more ample the tide of Christian conviction now, fed by the thoughts and aspirations of eighteen centuries, than it was at the beginning, in the minds of Peter and Bartholomew! For the plain prediction of Jesus was that the Spirit of Truth should come to lead his Church into all truth, taking of his, and showing it to his disciples, and adding to the belief of the Church, year by year, those many things which he had to say, but which they were not then capable of receiving.

So the stream of Christian thought flows on through the centuries, — one great stream, with one great tendency and direction, the same great river of life evermore. Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. It makes its own banks, which are the verbal statements and creeds which define its course. But all definition is also limitation. The banks which mark the course also confine it; and so the stream, having made its banks, unmakes them again. It digs them away from below, it rises and overflows them above, it cuts a new channel, and leaves the old one forever. When the bank is undermined and the house which we built on it, and in which we expected to live comfortably forever, falls in, we are no doubt much discouraged. The creed which our fathers built with so much care is swept away by this freshet of theology. What shall we do? It is sad to see the old landmarks all gone, and this great, turbid, melan-

choly waste of waters taking the place of the limpid, transparent, quiet stream; but perhaps it is to bring new fertility to the soil for miles around, and make life richer than it ever was before.

The object of this Convention is the same for which our nation has been contending during the last four years. It is to do in the Christian Church what has at last been done in the State, — to join union and freedom. The National Union was before founded on slavery. It has now changed its base, and is founded on freedom. A few years ago a small handful of people declared that human slavery was wrong. They were ridiculed as fanatics, denounced as incendiaries, hooted at as visionaries. But they continued to appeal to the moral sentiment of the nation. They had against them every interest in the land, — that of the great political parties, of the great churches, of commerce, of manufacture, of good society. The political parties were afraid of being divided. The churches were afraid of losing their members, the business men of losing Southern trade, the manufacturers of losing Southern custom. But such is the might of truth applied to conscience that, one by one, each of these mighty interests has given way, and the nation become saturated with anti-slavery. Then the South went to war to defend slavery against the assaults of Northern conscience, and took for its motto "Disunion and Slavery." During these four memorable years the great battle has been waging between disunion and slavery on one side, union and freedom on the other. But who has not seen, through all these glorious but terrible days, the visible arm of God's providence leading our nation on? He has

led us through his red sea of war with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. He kept us in the wilderness till we were ready to put on our flag "Union and Freedom." While we only fought for union for white people, we were defeated: as soon as we added to it freedom for all, we triumphed. What prophet could have foretold to us four years ago what our eyes have seen, — Northern soldiers marching through Georgia, singing "John Brown's soul is marching on"; the portrait of John Brown himself hanging on the walls of Governor Wise's parlor in Virginia; a school of colored children taught in the house of that same governor who sent Mrs. Douglas to prison for teaching colored children to read and write; emancipated Missouri and Maryland passing the amendment of the Constitution to repeal slavery forever; and, finally, United States regiments, composed of freed slaves, holding Charleston and marching into conquered Richmond? The little handful of fanatics and visionaries, who believed conscience stronger than every interest united, have proved to be the most practical and most successful men of our age.

And now we come forward and claim the same thing for the Christian Church, that it should combine freedom and union. We also are now a little handful. We also are ridiculed as visionaries. But we Unitarians, whose best blood has also been shed in this great war for human liberty, all of whose churches have also mourned and rejoiced over their heroes and martyrs, whose sons have gone to die and whose daughters have given themselves to help the wounded and teach the slaves, — we Unitarians are ready for this other work now opening on the

land. We are ready to take the hands of all Christian men, and unite with them in a great League of Independent Churches, to do the work of the new civilization. Union and freedom for the sake of Christian work! Each church free to hold the opinions and adopt the ritual it will, but uniting with the others in doing the Master's work for his little ones, if it be only to give them a cup of cold water in his name. The nation which sought only unity, but tolerated slavery, was rent in twain. The Church which has aimed at unity, but has forbidden free thought, has been torn into sects and parties. But, as our nation, once more united and also emancipated, shall go on to a prosperity, power, and glory of which no one has dreamed, so, when the Church of Christ shall accept the liberty with which he makes us free, in the unity of his Spirit, it shall have that power to convert the world to righteousness which prophets have foretold, and of which the seer on Patmos only dreamed. Then shall all men know God, from the least to the greatest, and every knee bow, and every tongue confess Jesus to be Lord, to the glory of God, the father.

Come, then, long-expected day! Come, and gladden our waiting eyes. Come, Lord Jesus, almighty to redeem the world from its sins and miseries! Come, a State which shall never need to go to war again, all elements of war being rooted out forever! Come, a Church joining love of God with love of man, zeal with charity, reason with religion, faith with works!

The sound of the trumpet of war shall die away. The conflict of parties, nations, sects, shall one day cease; but not as long as earth lasts shall the echoes die of the

trumpets blown from age to age, by brave and true men, in behalf of liberty, justice, religion, humanity, virtue.